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Questions relating to information

Joint Inspection Unit

Public information and communications policies and practices in the United Nations system

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Public information and communications policies and practices in the United Nations system" (see A/71/383).

* A/71/150.

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Summary

In the report entitled "Public information and communications policies and practices in the United Nations system", the Joint Inspection Unit assesses the public information and communications function of individual agencies, as well as existing coordination mechanisms, and proposes nine benchmarks and six recommendations intended to foster good practices and the application of lessons learned.

The present note reflects the views of organizations of the United Nations system on the recommendations provided in the report. The views have been consolidated on the basis of input provided by member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which welcomed the report and supported some of its conclusions.

I. Introduction

1. In the report entitled "Public information and communications policies and practices in the United Nations system", the Joint Inspection Unit assesses the public information and communications function of individual agencies, as well as existing coordination mechanisms, and proposes nine benchmarks and six recommendations intended to foster good practices and the application of lessons learned. The Unit delves into such areas as organizational communications objectives, frameworks, strategies and resources and explores new forms of communication, including through an analysis of the growing influence of social media and its strengths and weaknesses. The Unit also examines the role of the United Nations Communications Group, United Nations information centres and the United Nations Development Group in forming a coherent system-wide message to stakeholders and the public.

II. General comments

2. Organizations of the United Nations system welcome the report, finding it a useful tool as they take a strategic view regarding communicating their work and achievements to stakeholders at various levels. Organizations generally support the recommendations and the nine benchmarks and express a willingness to promote their incremental inclusion, as needed, in policies and practices, with several organizations noting that processes to do so are already under way.

3. Some organizations note that the value of social media is presented in the report overwhelmingly and almost exclusively as a communications issue (see the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis on the use of social media). They point out, however, that social media can also be an innovative tool for programmes to better deliver on their mandate, citing such examples as partnering with social media platforms to advocate freedom of expression (e.g., against the shutdown of such platforms) or to send global health/emergency alerts, as the World Health Organization already does very effectively. When stakeholders such as Member States and heads of departments, funds and programmes observe how social media can advance programme delivery, they may demonstrate greater interest, which could result in increasing support.

4. Furthermore, some organizations point out that social media is increasingly powered by visual imagery that goes beyond photography to include new visual communications forms such as infographics, factographs, short videos and live video. Given that these enhanced techniques allow an organization to express and promote its work in a much more compelling manner than is possible with traditional communications tools, organizations emphasize the importance of making adequate graphic design and audiovisual resources available as a business-critical tool to make social media efforts more effective.

5. A related point made by some organizations is that, even though the recommendations emphasize the use of social media, given the nature of the target audience of some organizations, tools such as multimedia products and websites also have high priority, as does ensuring that both websites and web content (such as publications or documents) are mobile-friendly.

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III. Specific comments on recommendations

Recommendation 1

The legislative/governing bodies of the United Nations system organizations should request the executive heads to embrace the nine benchmarks proposed in the present report, in order to enhance the strategic role of the public information and communications function in contributing to the achievement of organizational goals and priorities, thereby promoting global support for their organization.

6. Organizations support recommendation 1.

Recommendation 2

Starting from the forthcoming programme and budget cycle, the executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should reinforce in a sustainable manner the strategic role of the public information and communications function within their organization, by adhering to the nine benchmarks proposed in the present report, as applicable.

7. Organizations support recommendation 2 and the benchmarks, noting the value of embedding public information and communications in strategic planning and emphasizing that strategic communications are critical to achieving institutional goals and objectives.

Recommendation 3

The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should encourage, as applicable, their representatives in UNCG at principals' level, and in the UNDG Communications and Advocacy Working Group, to coordinate their work closely and to develop strong complementarities and synergies between the two groups in order to further strengthen public information and communications capacity in the United Nations system.

8. Organizations support and welcome recommendation 3, noting the importance of coordination in the work of the two groups mentioned and the value of developing complementarities and synergies, as well as avoiding duplication of efforts. However, some organizations, especially smaller ones, express a need to ensure that all entities work together to determine what constitutes common public information and communications priorities, given that larger entities are in a position to deploy much greater time and resources.

Recommendation 4

The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should take concrete measures to strengthen public information and communications capacity at the field level within their organizations, when applicable. This, in turn, would enable local UNCGs to conduct joint activities with due attention to local circumstances and organizations' mandated priorities, and reinforce the effectiveness and impact of those activities.

9. Organizations support recommendation 4, noting that it is in the field where the human stories of transformation can be found. Even so, some organizations

express concern that implementation relies on clear commitments of sufficient levels of funding for communications, public information and public advocacy in order to meet the suggested outcomes.

Recommendation 5

The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations that have not yet done so should develop an effective social media strategy that is based on updated guidelines and is properly aligned with the other respective policies and frameworks/strategies for public information and communications.

10. Organizations support recommendation 5, with several noting that, while updates to existing social media strategies are under way, any expanded use is limited by availability of staff and other resources.

Recommendation 6

The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should strengthen the in-house capacity for social media management, with a view to creating specific content and maintaining organizational accounts, as well as to providing advice on the proper use of social media.

11. Recognizing the value of enhancing their social media capacity, organizations concur with recommendation 6. Several organizations note that they are moving forward with strengthening this important public information function.